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Statement of Representative Rush D. Holt of New Jersey on Aftermath Hurricane Katrina

Mr. Speaker, my thoughts and prayers today, and for the last few days, have been with the people of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama and their family members. The Gulf Coast region has experienced what will long be remembered as one of the worse natural disasters in our country's history. In the weeks, months and years to come a massive clean up will occur and then we will work to rebuild the homes, roads, businesses, and schools affected. But we will not be able to forget the death, the destruction or the emotional toll this terrible tragedy has inflicted on the people affected and across the Gulf Coast.

I am glad that we in Congress are providing the Federal Emergency Management Agency with the additional funds required to ensure that the needed rescue and recovery mission continues unimpeded. We have all seen on the television and read in the news papers about the current situation in the Gulf Coast. The images and stories are heartbreaking and deeply troubling, but they are of people we know and they are our fellow citizens. Many of us know people who live in New Orleans, might have been vacationing there, or were supposed to return to college this fall. These are our family members, our friends, and our neighbors, and we cannot let them down. My own sister lives in the heart of New Orleans and as we meet now she still waits for evacuation – for the fifth day without running water or power.

The essential role of government is to provide for its citizens in their time of need. Today, we cannot say that we have done a good job in that critical task. Too many of our own people are suffering in horrific conditions and there exists a general state of lawlessness in a few areas and more concerning is that many feel they have been abandoned. If we cannot meet the needs of these clearly desperate citizens in the Gulf Coast, we need to seriously reconsider our budget priorities and what we value as a society. I am troubled that the pleas of regional officials and those from cities like New Orleans for an increased federal commitment to guard against such storms have not been heeded over the past few years.

It is my deep hope that the federal government, with the money we are providing today, will ensure that order is restored to the affected region and that no one anywhere in the Gulf Coast is without food, water or shelter. But in the weeks and months ahead we need

also to ensure that the proper resources are dedicated to guarantee that a tragedy like this and its indescribable scale is not repeated again. What that means is a commitment by the federal government to the people of America to meet their domestic needs. For too long this government has tried to do more with less, it has tried to provide for our people on the cheap. But this week has reminded us that there are too many critical tasks and services that only government can provide and that we ensure that the federal government provides the essential funding that these services require.

This terrible tragedy has also reminded us of the generous and compassionate nature of the American people. Already the Red Cross has received well over \$100 million in donations to the relief effort. People all across America are emptying their coin jars and offering empty rooms to help in anyway they can. I know that this compassion will continue and I encourage all Americans to do what ever they can to help our fellow citizens in their most desperate time of need. However, I am troubled to see instances of greed in this time of desperate need. I have heard already from a number of my constituents who saw the price of gas skyrocket. I, along with other members of Congress, will be looking into any instances of price gouging. In such a time of despair for so many, price gouging can not be tolerated

Once again, I want to express my condolences to those who have lost loved ones in the wake of Hurricane Katrina and to share my prayers of hope for those who remain in despair. I know that much remains to be done and I am hopeful that the funding we are providing today will go along way to meeting the desperate needs of those in the Gulf Coast. The full story of this disaster remains to be told, but I am confident that out of dark moments of this tragedy will come beacons of light for those affected and a serious discussion about our true national priorities.